



**Retiring with 33 Years of Service,
Greenup Co. ATC Principal
Marsha Burks Martin is
Described by Staff and Colleagues as
Professional, Fair and Caring**

In December 2006, the Greenup Co. ATC faculty, staff and students will lose their trusted principal of 10.5 years when Marsha Burks Martin retires with 33 years of experience. Only the second administrator since the school's inception in 1968, Martin has been at the helm since July 1, 1996. She is considered a professional, fair and caring administrator by not only her faculty and staff, but the administrators in the local school district as well.

**At left,
Greenup Co.
ATC
Principal
Marsha Burks
Martin**





Equipped with an array of experiences coming into her current position, Martin first began thinking about a career in education when she enrolled in the Education Teachers College at Marshall University. She received her Bachelor of Arts in Education in May 1971. Shortly thereafter, Martin began working on a master's degree in counseling at Marshall. Half-way through her program, a friend called to inform her about a teaching position at what was formerly called Ashland State Vocational Technical School (SVTS) - now called Ashland Community and Technical College. She researched the position, applied and was offered her first teaching job as a business instructor at the school. She served in that capacity from 1974 – 1990. From the onset of her teaching career, she was “hooked on vocational technical education” and has seen many changes take place over the many years she has spent in the system.

“I fell in love with vocational education and decided to get a master's degree in vocational administration,” says Martin. “It was the right move for me and I have gained tremendously as a result of taking this road.”

Marsha went on to receive her Master of Science degree in vocational education administration in 1980 from Morehead State University while continuing to work. Changes at the state school took place over a period of time - Day Principal John Picklesimer retired and Howard Moore, who served as night principal took over. When the former Regional Director Charlie Chattin retired, Howard Moore became the new regional director.

At that time, Martin applied for and was offered the position of Ashland SVTS principal. She served in that capacity from 1990-1994.

“Going from the position of classroom teacher into becoming the state school principal was a huge transition. And boy, I didn’t have any idea of what I was getting into; but learned very quickly that the job was challenging and rewarding,” says Martin. “I learned to be a principal by working for and with Howard Moore. I also learned everything else from my father, John Loren Burks.”

Martin is one of three children of John L and Doris Burks. All three children have achieved success in their career endeavors. John L, Jr., her brother, was an educator. He was a high school, middle and elementary principal. He also taught high school English and Spanish. Her sister Nancy, who Marsha considers her “best friend,” is a registered nurse. She currently works as a home health nurse in rural Logan Co., West Virginia. All three siblings have great admiration for their parents.

“My father was a self made man. He grew up hard in Logan Co. West Virginia and was a WW II veteran. He only had a high school education, but ended up owning two grocery stores and was on the board of directors at the local bank. Everybody called him boss and everybody loved him because he was honest, kind, and you could depend on him to do the right thing in any situation,” says Martin. “Whenever I had problems with anything, I always called my dad and talked it over with him. I was very lucky because he taught me so many valuable lessons in life. ”

In 1994, Martin decided it was time for a change and accepted the Dean of Instruction position at the Ashland SVTS. She worked in that capacity until 1996 when she became principal of the Greenup Co. ATC. A woman with a vivid memory, Martin remembers having a discussion with her father regarding an article that was written about her accepting the ATC principal’s position.

“In the last line of the article, I was quoted as saying, ‘The lady before me left a great



school and great staff.’ When my father read this, he said to me, ‘That’s what I was looking for baby.’ My father was all about doing everything for the right reasons. He would often say, ‘Every now and then, the room needs a good dose of common sense.’ I have never forgotten those words because daddy was absolutely right.”

Marsha’s mother, Doris Burks, was a “very loving, demanding mother” who made her all her children strive for excellence. “She never accepted anything done half-way. If she thought you did, well, it was done over until it was done right. My mother valued education as much as anyone I have ever known. She was valedictorian of her class but could never go to college. However, she made sure every one of her children did because she never wanted us to have to suffer as she had. My mother was also my scout leader and the only Sunday school teacher I ever had—from Kindergarten through my senior year of high school. She kept us well grounded in the church and introduced me to the Lord. What greater gift can a mother give to her children? This spiritual

education has helped me to always be ethical and honest; which is what I expect from my students. You know, I think they like the fact that I expect honesty from them because it makes them walk a littler taller and gives them the confidence they need to be successful.”

Since 1996 Martin has worked diligently to provide quality technical education and skills training for all the students who attend the ATC. She has also taken great care in supporting her faculty and staff – while at the same



time, exercising good doses of “common sense.” Over the years, she has worked aggressively to cross academic boundary lines by helping to raise expectations in vocational-technical classes. She has encouraged her staff to work with the instructors at the high school to develop relationships focused on engaging students in quality learning.

When Martin first arrived at Greenup, integration of technical and academic skills was being addressed on a statewide basis.

“I began by literally walking the halls of the high school and introducing myself to all the teachers, and attending site base and faculty meetings. My staff was required to serve on at least two site-base committees,” says Martin. “I made copies of integration activities published by the state and sent a personal letter to each high school faculty member inviting them to participate in an integration activity with the technical staff. After 10 years, about half of our programs are actively engaged in meaningful integration projects with the high school; however, my staff is to be commended because they have initiated every project.”

Additionally, the district has hired two curriculum resource teachers (CRT); Jeani Gollihue who teaches math and English Instructor Latisha Sparks. Over the past three years, Martin has set up in-service sessions with these two CRTs to help her staff increase their understanding of and teaching approaches to reach district and KERA goals.



“These two ladies have been very helpful and genuinely interested in bridging the gap between technical and academic education,” says Martin. “My staff has also helped with portfolio writing assignments and open-response questions as part of their curriculum. Each year my staff and I have attended in-service sessions on ways to improve these items for the high school.”

A few years ago, Martin and district administrators arranged a partnership where English Teacher Cindy Collier, Science Instructor Rosemary Waller, and Tech Ed Teacher Tommy Crump serve as resource teachers for newly hired KY Tech teachers. The idea has helped develop positive partnerships and get those teachers into the ATC. “It has helped initiate integration projects with my teachers,” says Martin.



“We have encouraged all the high school instructors to use our computer labs so students have an opportunity to type their portfolio entries. This was done in an effort to get all students into our building along with their respective instructor to heighten the awareness of who we are, what we do and how we can be of service. This outreach effort has yielded mutually beneficial results and built a positive rapport among teachers and administrators throughout the entire school district,” says Martin. “We have also equipped and made available a conference room for district personnel and people within the community to use in an effort to get them all in the ATC. This has helped form personal bonds so they can see that we are a professional, highly motivated, highly skilled training facility and not a place for troublemakers.”

These efforts could not have been accomplished without the support of the high school principals. “During my tenure in this ATC, I have had the pleasure of working with five different principals including Mike Thoroughman, Mike Raby; John Younce, former interim principal who currently serves as the Greenup Co. Schools Superintendent; Randy Pepper, and Greenup Co. High School’s current Principal Matt Baker.”

“Marsha is one of the most professional people than I have come into contact with during my years in education. She has always cared about the students in Greenup Co., and has made a positive difference in lives of the students that she has touched. We will miss her and wish her the best in the future,” says Superintendent Younce.

Technology needs have also been an issue in local school districts across the Commonwealth since KETS began. Martin helped bridge the gap when Greenup Co. district Chief Information Officer Tony Carr needed to expand. “We offered one of our computer labs to them to assist the entire district in meeting new and challenging technology goals,” says Martin. “It has been a positive relationship for all of us.”

It is because of these and other efforts that a paradigm shift has occurred in Greenup Co. It has been through these types of collaborative efforts with local district personnel that technical education is accepted as the concrete and practical application in learning in Greenup Co.



“There is not a day that goes by that I don’t thank Mrs. Martin and her entire staff for allowing us to use a valued classroom for our needs in helping all students in Greenup Co.” says Carr.

Photo: Greenup Co. CIO Tony Carr

“I have to say, the perception of vocational technical education has changed. I have been told many times we are a ‘class act’ by some in our district. My staff has been very cooperative and frequently stepped out of their comfort zone to help with these efforts. They have worked overtime on many occasions to help with these goals, for no compensation—and it has paid off. We are not yet where we would like to be, but positive improvements have been made.”

Of her faculty, Martin says, “Every member of my staff has given me more than I have ever given them because they all care about our students. I’m very fortunate because I have a great staff. We are a family and we all take care of each other in the hard times, and celebrate the good times. That’s why we have a great school.”

Marsha has a 21 year old son, Andy. “He’s the light of my life, a good Christian boy and every mother’s dream.” Andy is studying radiology at Kings Daughters Hospital in Ashland. He went to Marshall University to get his basics and will earn his degree

through the Ashland CTC and hospital. “He is already talking about specializing, so I expect he will be in school for several more years,” says Martin.

In 1994, Marsha married her true love Clay. He is a retired electrician from the West Virginia coal industry. “My marriage to him has been like a Harlequin Romance,” says Marsha.

“Marsha has been an outstanding administrator because she has always provided us with good leadership and the support we needed to do our jobs effectively. Because of her sixth sense, she has been there for all of us for a variety of reasons and we appreciate her ability to understand what to do in any given circumstance. She has a way with words- she has firmly and fairly relayed her expectations for job performance, encouraged us when we needed the positive reinforcement, and congratulated us on a job well done,” says Welding Instructor Pete Williams. “From a personal standpoint, *if I had a sister, I would want her to be just like Marsha.*”



Pete and Marsha



Marsha
and
Randy

“Mrs. Martin will be missed by all who have had the pleasure of working with her. She is truly a wonderful person who has touched so many lives in a positive direction. Her position may be refilled, but she will never be replaced.”

Randy Steele
Automotive Technology Instructor



**Photo (l to r): Debbie Taylor,
Marsha Burks Martin and
Paula Ledford.**

“Marsha has been a wonderful supervisor. She is protective and supportive of her staff and really loves her students. She is always available when a student has a problem, whether it is school related or not. Her positive attitude has kept us going through many hard situations, and she will be sorely missed.”
Paula Ledford
Office Support Assistant II

“It has been a great experience having Mrs. Martin as our administrator. When she came to Greenup Co., her main goal was to enhance the quality of technical education being offered to our students. During her administration, the decision-making process was always based on ‘how it would affect the needs of our students.’ Through her efforts, she has achieved the respect and friendship of the staff and faculty, and a team working environment. She has developed a great rapport with local school district administrators and the community,” says *Administrative Secretary Debbie Taylor*. “The respect she has attained from the students is extraordinary. Not only do they respect her as a principal, but also as a friend. Her accomplishments will not go unnoticed. For many years we will continue hearing success stories from our students because of the educational and caring environment she has created. We will certainly miss Mrs. Martin—our administrator and friend.”



"I feel that Mrs. Martin is the epitome of strength and kindness. She treats each employee and student with respect and dignity, and makes us all feel like we are part of a team effort. I have been blessed to have started my teaching career with a principal like her. She will be hard to replace; not only in position, but as a colleague, friend and mentor."
Cheryl Wellman
Office Technology Instructor



"Mrs. Martin is very respected throughout the school and community. She has been a wonderful leader, role model, and friend to all of us. I've enjoyed working with her and she has inspired me to pursue my administration certification - which I had never given a second thought to before she mentioned it to me. She will be greatly missed by all of us."
Sarah Johnson
Office Technology Instructor

"She is one special lady. There are not enough words to describe her special gift of knowing how to handle situations. I've seen her working with the kids and she can handle anything. There was a time when a student spit tobacco on my floor. She found out and called the student into her office. The student was not going to clean it up and after a discussion with Mrs. Martin, he cleaned up the floor. Although she deserves to retire, she will be missed. Life is short and you need to have time to do some things you want to do."



Marsha and her "little outlaw," Jessie James.



Marsha and Gary

“Her main purpose as a principal is to make sure students are treated fairly first, and then to make sure that her faculty and staff are treated with respect. Her working relationship with the high school and board is outstanding. She has brought respect to this position, a respect that we didn’t have before from the high school. They see us more as equals now.”

**Gary Calhoun
CAD Instructor**



**Marsha and
Lyle**

“Marsha Martin has been a wonderful encouragement to me since the beginning of my journey teaching on the vocational side of the fence. Having come from teaching English for the past three years, the transition to teaching electricity has been challenging. She has been the guiding light,” says Electricity Instructor Lyle Parker. “She has also given me the confidence to succeed on my own by giving me the freedom to run my shop the way I feel will best benefit my students. Her leadership in running this school has, in my opinion, gone unsurpassed by any other principal I have worked with. Even though I have not known her that long, I have seen her caring for these kids abound every day through her smile as they walk the halls. She will be missed greatly.”



Richard and Marsha

“I will greatly miss Mrs. Martin’s enthusiasm, caring nature and leadership. She is by far the best supervisor I have ever had the pleasure to work for and has been such a strong supporter of my program and the FFA chapter at our school,” says Horticulture Instructor Richard Willis. “Marsha is a die hard program assessment administrator. Her philosophy when it comes to the black box is, ‘If you’re not first, you’re last.’ I will always have a special place in my heart for Marsha and I wish her the best in her new life of retirement.”

“Marsha Martin was my principal mentor a little over 9 years ago. But, with Marsha the process never stopped just because KPIP was over. To this day she calls to see how things are going at work, at home or to see how I’m feeling. Marsha is much more than a co-worker; she is a dear lifelong friend. Even though Marsha is moving forward, I know she will always look back with fond memories of friendships made and goals accomplished,” says Russell ATC Principal Keith Parsons. “Marsha never flinches at problems but faces them directly. She is never bitter, but doesn’t care to let you know how she feels. I have always appreciated her honesty and the strength of her convictions. She now has set new goals and priorities for her life. I will miss her, but know she’s only a phone call away. I’m sure the system that she has supported for over 33 years will miss her too. It is my hope to one day have what it takes to be a friend and mentor to someone in our system like she has been to me.”



**Russell ATC Principal Keith Parsons and
Greenup Co. ATC Principal Marsha Burks Martin**

Question and Answer Session with Marsha Burks Martin

Q: What do you consider to be your most important contribution in this field during your tenure?

A: Hiring great teachers for my students. It has always been my goal to hire teachers that know their trade, but who love teaching and genuinely care about students. If they have this, then they will be great teachers. When I interview a person for a job – I don't just listen to what they say. I listen to the words they use to say what they are trying to convey. This was a valuable lesson that I learned from a training session where we were taught to evaluate people who wanted to go into leadership positions.

Q: What do you think people will remember you by?

A: I'd like to think that people will say I was always fair, yet firm - *Firm*, in the sense that I always had high expectations for success and professional behavior. In my opinion, we don't just teach a trade, we have to teach a work ethic or else the greatest tradesperson in the world can't keep a job.

Q: What guidance and or advice would you provide to any new principal within the system?

A: To me, the single most important thing a principal needs to do is to listen. You cannot lead without listening and it's important to listen to everybody. Listening allows you to understand where people are coming from – It's imperative that you know where they are before you can take them to where they need to be.

Q: What do you consider to be the most important issue facing vocational-technical education today?

A: Based on feedback from our recent business and industry forum, one of the biggest challenges facing vocational technical education today is that we are being asked to teach general education requirements in addition to technical skills. Don't get me wrong, writing and math are essential skills students must have to be successful, but those skills should be taught in general education through the 10 or so years before they reach the technical schools – then, what we do reinforces those basic skills. By spending additional time in the classroom to teach academic skills, we are not teaching the trade skills that I believe are necessary for our students to make it in the industrial workforce.

Q: What are the qualities that make a good principal?

A: *Common sense* – I am a product of Loren Burks and learned how important it was to use common sense. You can have all the training available, but if you can't make a good solid decision, then all is wasted.

Honesty and empathy – you should never forget what it's like to be a student or teacher.

Tough love – a principal can run a tight ship when everyone knows he or she makes a decision based on what's best for the students and staff. Sometimes, the decision is not popular, but if it's fair, people will accept it. There is also an element of trust in that your staff will follow you on a decision that they don't readily understand or agree with, but they trust you enough to know the outcome will benefit the school, so they follow you.

Be a facilitator, not a boss. - The principal should make sure the teachers have what they need to teach effectively.

Q: What do you consider to be the positive influences that student organizations have on vocational-technical education participants?

A: Leadership, self-confidence, social skills, and a desire to succeed. There is such a transformation for some students as they become engaged in the positive activities offered through student organizations.



**Good News Story
#180**

**By: Fran Dundon
November 13, 2006**



Editor's Note: You have obviously made a mark on those you have come into contact with over the years – including me. Your canvas of life is full of brilliant colors – as a mother, wife, daughter, sister, professional, colleague and friend.

The Greenup Co. ATC Family: Front row (l to r): Sarah Johnson, Richard Willis, Jessie James, and Cheryl Wellman. Back row (l to r): Paula Ledford, Lyle Parker, Gary Calhoun, Marsha Martin, Debbie Taylor, Pete Williams and Randy Steele.